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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 DOHA 000368

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KMPI](#) [PREL](#) [QA](#)  
SUBJECT: QATAR CENTRAL MUNICIPAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS SEE  
NEARLY 50 PERCENT TURNOUT

REF: A. DOHA 340  
[1](#)B. DOHA 327

[1](#)1. Summary. Qatar held national elections for the third session of the Central Municipal Council (CMC) April 1. The turnout (nearly 50 percent) was higher than many predicted. One of three women running for the council was re-elected in a landslide. Voting ran smoothly without significant problems. In contrast to previous elections, affinity to familial and tribal ties appeared to count less than experience and ability. Women's direct participation increased, and their influence on the choices of other members of the family was noted by the candidates. End Summary.

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Turnout  
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[1](#)2. Elections for the third session of the Qatar Central Municipal Council (CMC) on April 1 saw a notable increase in voter turnout compared to the last elections held in April [1](#)2003. According to figures released by the Ministry of Interior (MOI), 51 percent of the registered voters cast their ballots as compared to the 40 percent who voted in the 2003 election. Of 28,139 registered voters, 13,656 exercised their franchise - 7,295 men and 6,361 women. The total number of male registered voters was 14,531, while there were 13,608 registered female voters. (Note: According to the total voter breakdown provided by the MOI, the actual turnout was 48.5 percent vice 51.1 percent. Post will attempt to clarify the discrepancy between these two figures.) Women's participation in the elections increased significantly compared to prior elections. Their relative participation was higher than men in nine of the 29 districts.

[1](#)3. Cities and villages outside Doha recorded a higher voter turnout compared to several prominent constituencies inside the city. Of the 29 constituencies, Al-Shahaniya recorded the

highest voter participation (more than 80 percent), closely followed by Al-Shamal. In contrast, less than 40 percent of the registered voters in the New Doha district voted.

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Female Candidate Wins in Landslide  
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¶4. Sheikha Al-Jefairi, the only female CMC member, received the highest percentage of votes for any candidate. Of the 879 votes cast in her district, she received 800 of them, while the remaining 79 were shared by two male candidates. There were a total of 1,451 registered voters in the constituency - 740 women and 711 men. Sheikha Al-Jefairi told Poloff April 3 that she won because of her achievements and dedication in the previous session of the CMC. She added that her victory is a fitting response to those who questioned her eligibility when she won her seat in the second CMC election by "recommendation." (Note: A male member of Sheikha Al-Jefairi's family dropped out of the race shortly before the 2003 election, leaving her unopposed for the seat.)

¶5. In a meeting with U.S. Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) April 3, Sheikha Al-Jefairi exuded confidence and noted that she had predicted her election victory in advance. She noted that she would fulfill her electoral program and provide her constituents with better healthcare and educational facilities by establishing a health care center and by increasing the number of schools in the area. "I will also seek to find a solution to the recurring traffic snarl in the area and ensure high standards of road safety," she added. Congresswoman Maloney was present in Qatar during the first CMC elections in 1999 and noted, "It seems that some sort of change is happening. I think Al-Jefairi's win is a step forward in the direction of women's empowerment in Qatar." When asked if she planned to run for the national Advisory Council, the elections for which are expected sometime next year, Al-Jefairi was non-committal. She said she preferred to be a member of the CMC and added, "I do not consider running for the proposed elections, at least for now."

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The Losers  
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¶6. The situation was different for female candidate Suhaila Al-Hareb. Suhaila was seeking election in the Al-Jasrah district which witnessed the lowest voter turnout (28 percent). She lost the election, receiving only 50 votes compared to 180 votes for her male rival. Al-Hareb told Poloff April 3 that friendship and personal relations were the primary motivating factors for voters in her district. She also accused the MOI Election Supervising Committee (ESC) of not being neutral by allowing family members of the male candidate to be present at the polling station and to influence voters before casting their votes. Rather than officially contesting the vote, Suhaila plans to publicize her opinions in the local press.

¶7. Dr. Amina Al-Heil, the third female candidate, remains undaunted. During a reception for the election winners April 3, she announced her decision to run in the upcoming parliamentary elections, "I will not give up. I will contest the upcoming parliamentary election. I also plan to contest the next CMC elections."

¶8. Pol Assistant contacted two of the five incumbent candidates on April 4 who lost their races. Issa Al-Kuwari, Deputy Chairman of the current CMC, ran against two other candidates and lost. Explaining his defeat, he told Emboff, "People wanted a change, that's all." Nassir Suleiman Al-Dosari ran against one other candidate (Mubarak Farish Mubark Saleh Salem) in the Doha suburb of Gharaffa. He told us that the winner used his position in sewage affairs at the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture to his advantage. Al-Gharaffa has no sewage system and relies completely on tankers provided by the municipality. "Because

of his position, he has access to the contact information for all voters in the district. He was able to reach the women inside their homes and got their promises to vote for him," Al-Dosari noted. He added that, "Women have a strong influence over their family members; as such the women voters affected the result significantly." He blamed the voters for the lack of awareness. "They based their votes on promises given to whoever could reach them first rather than their capabilities or achievements," he added. Given that many people don't read newspapers in Qatar, he blamed Qatar TV for its weak coverage of the election campaign. He believes that TV is the most important tool that can be used to raise awareness among the voters. Citing an example, he noted, "People did not know that they have to register their names at least two weeks before the election. A lot of them were sent away on voting day because their names were not registered."

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The Polls  
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¶9. Polling started at 8am and closed at 5pm, at which time the ballot boxes were sealed. One public school in each district was used as a polling station. Ministers, the Advisory Council Spokesman, and other high-ranking officials were noted casting their votes in their respective districts. The President of Courts and the Minister of Interior toured the polling stations to witness the process. The Qatar National Human Rights Committee formed four committees to survey the 29 polling stations in order to ensure transparency and to confirm that the rights of voters and candidates were guaranteed. Qatar TV and Radio and local newspapers covered the election. The counting started immediately after closure, and results were announced the same evening.

¶10. Speaking to the media April 1, Major Salim Saqr Al-Miraikhi, head of the legal section of the ESC, said the polling ran smoothly in all constituencies, despite some minor violations of electoral rules. According to Al-Miraikhi, one voter came to one of the polling stations wearing a t-shirt displaying the picture of a particular candidate, which was illegal. He was ordered to leave the area.

¶11. Emborffs visited five polling stations during the voting. According to observations, the turnout was generally low early and picked up gradually by midday. Women's participation was noticeable. Since CMC election regulations require the personal presence of each voter, aged and handicapped people with wheelchairs were seen participating in the process. Women's polling places were separated from those for men. Male and female security personnel were deployed in all constituencies and were assisted by volunteers of both genders to guide and help voters. Voters had to show their identification and voting cards in order to be allowed directly to the polling counter. Those who had registered but didn't have their voting cards with them were given one on the spot. Voting procedures were explained patiently to voters when required.

¶12. Some voters felt that the election was an important step towards achieving a democratic system in Qatar. Ali Moosa Eisa, a voter from the Old Airport district, told a local newspaper, "Gone are the days when people voted for members of their family or tribe. Now the voters are more critical and they are looking at the qualifications of the candidate and whether they are capable of doing some good job in their constituency."

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Comment  
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¶13. Given the perceived apathy by voters and even some of the candidates prior to the election, the turnout was much higher than expected. The voting process appeared very orderly and

well supervised. Candidates and voters have learned much through the three elections. The role of women in elections, not only as candidates or voters, but as a powerful influence in the home, has been realized by some of the population. It appears as if this incremental step in democratization may lead to a more participative role of citizens in the governing of their country.

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